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ABSTRACT

Almost 27 million children in the U.S.--or 42 percent of those under age 18--had mothers working or seeking work in March 1974. About one in four of these children (6.1 million) were below regular school age. Since 1970, the number of children whose mothers were in the labor force has risen sharply by 1.2 million, while the total number of children in families has dropped by 2.2 million. The absolute increase in the total number of children with working mothers occurred almost exclusively in female-headed families. Over 12 million children were in families where the father was either absent (8.6 million), unemployed (1.5 million), or not in the labor force (2.0 million). Included are three tables: (1) number of children under 18 years old, by age, type of family, labor force status of mother, and race, March 1970 and March 1974; (2) number of families and average number of own children under 18 years old, by type of family, labor force status of mother, and race, March 1970 and March 1974; and (3) number of children under 18 years old, median family income in 1973, type of family, labor force status of parents, and race, March 1974. (Author/NH)

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SUMMARY SPECIAL LABOR FORCE REPORT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR Bureau of Labor Statistics

ED101126

Children of Working Mothers, March 1974

Almost 27 million children in the United States--or 42 percent of those under age 18--had mothers who were working or seeking work in March 1974. About 1 of every 4 of these children (6.1 million) were below regular school age, and probably required some kind of care in their working mother's absence. (See table 1.)

Since 1970, the number of children whose mothers were in the labor force has risen sharply by 1.2 million, while the total number of children in families has dropped by 2.2 million. Contributing to these opposing trends are the continuing long-term rise in the labor force participation of married women, both with and without children; the briskly declining birth rate; and an increase in the number of families headed by women, largely due to the escalating divorce rate. While labor force participation rates of wives rose significantly between 1970 and 1974 (from 40 to 43 percent for those with children under age 18 and from 26 to 31 percent for those with youngsters under age 3), the absolute increase in the total number of children with working mothers occurred almost exclusively in female-headed families. Whether families were headed by men or women, and whether they were white or black, the average number of children was smaller for families if the mother were in the labor force than if she were not. (See table 2.)

September 1974

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Most children are better off in terms of family income if their mother is in the labor force. Among children in husband-wife families, median family income in 1973 was over $15,000 if the mother worked, compared with over $13,000 if she did not. (See table 3.) In families headed by women, the same relationship held, but median income was considerably lower whether the mother was in ($6,195) or out ($3,760) of the labor force. (Note: Income was reported for the year 1973; labor force status was reported for March 1974.)

Over 12 million children were in families where the father was either absent (8.6 million), unemployed (1.5 million), or not in the labor force (2.0 million). Nearly half (47 percent) of all black children were living under these circumstances, compared with 15 percent of the white children.

These findings are from the annual survey of marital and family characteristics of workers, conducted for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. Additional information will be published in a forthcoming issue of the Monthly Labor Review.

Table 1. Number of children under 18 years old, by age, type of family, labor force status of mother, and race, March 1970 and March 1974

(Numbers in thousands)

Type of family, labor force status of mother, and race	Age of children, 1970			Age of children, 1974		
	Under 18 years	Under 6 years	6 to 17 years	Under 18 years	Under 6 years	6 to 17 years
Total children[1]	65,755	19,606	46,149	63,542	18,505	45,037
Mother in labor force	25,544	5,590	19,954	26,768	6,086	20,682
Husband-wife family	58,399	17,920	40,479	54,154	16,303	37,851
Mother in labor force	21,982	4,947	17,035	22,165	5,173	16,992
Mother not in labor force	36,417	12,973	23,444	31,989	11,130	20,859
Female family head[2]	6,695	1,593	5,102	8,648	2,106	6,542
Mother in labor force	3,562	643	2,919	4,603	913	3,690
Mother not in labor force	3,133	950	2,183	4,045	1,193	2,852
Other male family head[2]	661	93	568	740	96	644
White children, total	56,903	16,940	39,963	54,504	15,902	38,602
Mother in labor force	21,194	4,459	16,735	22,292	4,942	17,350
Husband-wife family	52,336	15,975	36,361	48,591	14,610	33,981
Mother in labor force	18,865	4,083	14,782	19,168	4,346	14,822
Mother not in labor force	33,471	11,892	21,579	29,423	10,264	19,159
Female family head[2]	4,102	908	3,194	5,339	1,229	4,110
Mother in labor force	2,329	376	1,953	3,124	596	2,528
Mother not in labor force	1,773	532	1,241	2,215	633	1,582
Other male family head[2]	465	57	408	574	63	511
Negro children, total	8,054	2,381	5,673	8,068	2,259	5,809
Mother in labor force	4,015	1,031	2,984	4,028	1,018	3,012
Husband-wife family	5,335	1,683	3,652	4,743	1,379	3,364
Mother in labor force	2,810	775	2,035	2,603	717	1,886
Mother not in labor force	2,525	908	1,617	2,140	662	1,478
Female family head[2]	2,529	663	1,866	3,168	852	2,316
Mother in labor force	1,205	256	949	1,425	301	1,124
Mother not in labor force	1,324	407	917	1,743	551	1,192
Other male family head[2]	190	35	155	157	28	129

[1] Children are defined as "own" children of the family head and include never married sons and daughters, step-children, and adopted children. Excluded are other related children such as grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins, and unrelated children.

[2] Widowed, divorced, separated, and single family heads.

Table 2. Number of families and average number of own children under 18 years old, by type of family, labor force status of mother, and race, March 1970 and March 1974

Type of family, labor force status of mother, and race	March 1970		March 1974	
	Number of families with children under 18 years old (thousands)	Average number of children per family[1]	Number of families with children under 18 years old (thousands)	Average number of children per family[1]
ALL FAMILIES				
Husband-wife families	25,547	2.29	25,275	2.14
Mother in labor force	10,210	2.15	10,907	2.03
Mother not in labor force	15,337	2.37	14,368	2.23
Female family head	2,924	2.29	4,080	2.12
Mother in labor force	1,731	2.06	2,438	1.89
Mother not in labor force	1,193	2.63	1,642	2.46
WHITE				
Husband-wife families	23,285	2.25	22,887	2.12
Mother in labor force	8,970	2.10	9,565	2.00
Mother not in labor force	14,315	2.34	13,322	2.21
Female family head	1,994	2.05	2,731	1.95
Mother in labor force	1,237	1.88	1,742	1.79
Mother not in labor force	757	2.34	989	2.24
NEGRO				
Husband-wife families	2,001	2.67	2,020	2.35
Mother in labor force	1,120	2.51	1,160	2.24
Mother not in labor force	881	2.87	860	2.49
Female family head	912	2.77	1,289	2.46
Mother in labor force	485	2.48	671	2.12
Mother not in labor force	427	3.10	618	2.82

[1] See footnote 1, table 1.

Table 3. Number of children under 18 years old, median family income in 1973, type of family, labor force status of parents, and race, March 1974

(Numbers in thousands)

Type of family and labor force status of parents, as of March 1974	All children		White		Negro	
	Number	Median family income in 1973	Number	Median family income in 1973	Number	Median family income in 1973
Total children[1]	63,542	$12,795	54,504	$13,485	8,068	$ 7,365
Mother in labor force	26,768	13,762	22,292	14,470	4,028	9,673
Husband-wife families	54,154	13,909	48,591	14,225	4,743	10,446
Mother in labor force	22,165	15,000+	19,168	15,000+	2,603	12,667
Mother not in labor force	31,989	13,086	29,423	13,428	2,140	8,135
Father employed	50,624	14,226	45,798	14,495	4,097	11,182
Mother in labor force	20,820	15,000+	18,107	15,000+	2,360	13,012
Mother not in labor force	29,804	13,408	27,691	13,682	1,737	8,726
Father unemployed	1,482	10,285	1,166	11,110	283	7,571
Mother in labor force	588	11,818	465	12,199	116	8,688
Mother not in labor force	894	9,127	701	10,050	167	7,191
Father not in labor force	2,048	7,327	1,627	7,856	363	5,603
Mother in labor force	757	9,148	596	9,495	127	8,187
Mother not in labor force	1,291	6,060	1,031	6,471	236	4,662
Female family head	8,648	4,729	5,339	5,236	3,168	4,227
Mother in labor force	4,603	6,193	3,124	6,734	1,425	5,058
Employed	4,186	6,422	2,901	6,899	1,232	5,397
Unemployed	417	3,678	223	4,057	193	3,419
Mother not in labor force	4,045	3,758	2,215	3,791	1,743	3,779
Other male family head	740	11,867	574	12,379	157	9,200

[1] See footnote 1, table 1.

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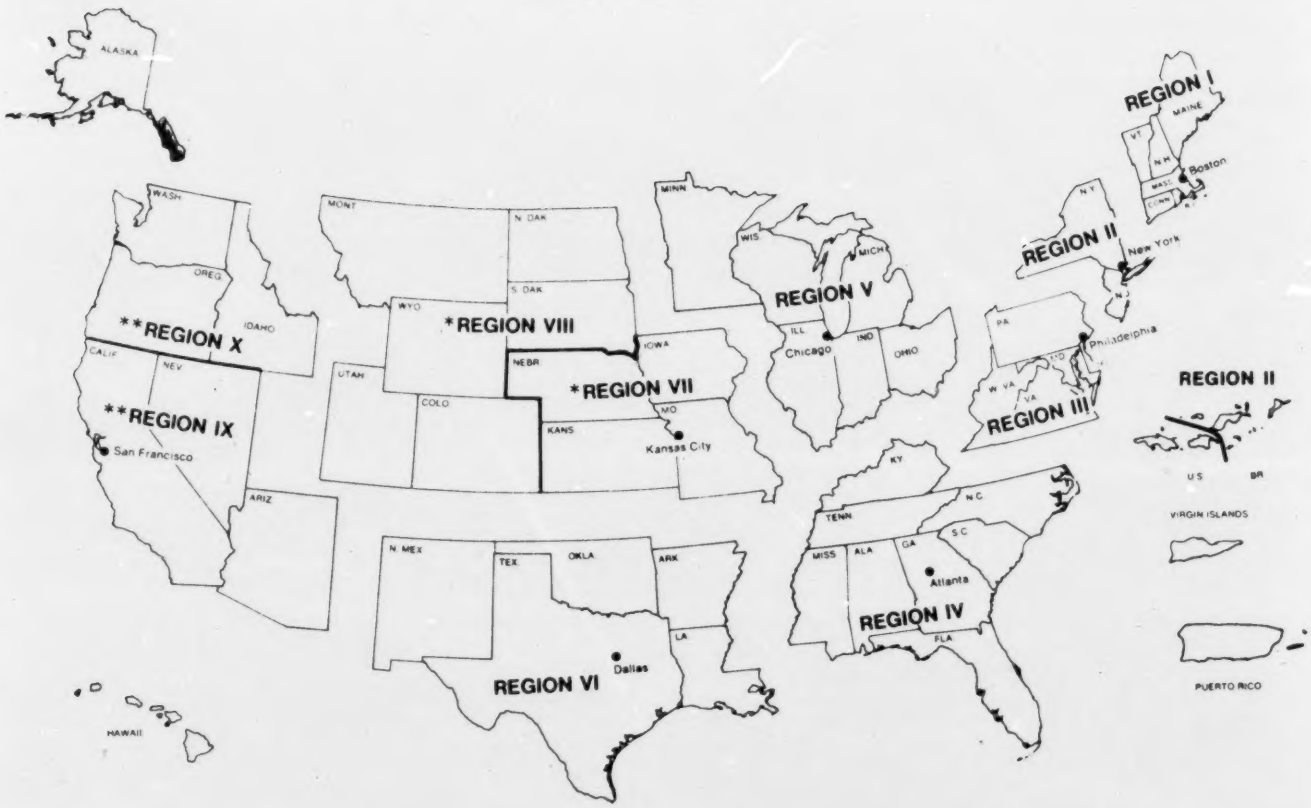

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